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301013Z May 03

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 001081

SIPDIS

NSC FOR SENIOR DIRECTOR FRAZER
PARIS FOR C.NEARY
LONDON FOR C. GURNEY
NAIROBI FOR T.PFLAUMER
BANGKOK FOR WYN DAYTON
DS/OP/AF

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/29/2008

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [ASEC](#) [ZI](#)

SUBJECT: MDC OFFICIALLY ANNOUNCES NATIONWIDE PROTESTS WEEK OF JUNE 2-6; COULD BE SOONER ACCORDING TO INSIDER

REF: A. HARARE 1076

[B.](#) HARARE 1058

Classified By: Political Officer Peggy Blackford for reasons 1.5 b/d

[¶](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. The MDC officially announced that protests including demonstrations would begin June 2 and run throughout the week. However, in contrast to the official MDC call for mass action next week, MDC Special Presidential Advisor Gandhi Mudzingwa confided that the party hoped to move up its timetable, turn out large crowds for short demonstrations in the high density areas over the weekend, and avoid confrontations by catching the GOZ off guard. He indicated that the MDC is now confident that most police and army are sympathetic to the MDC cause and will remain neutral. If the demonstrations are a success, the MDC will simply declare victory on Monday and will mostly limit next week's action to a stayaway. The MDC hopes that these actions will sway additional ZANU-PF loyalists to the view that a negotiated change is essential. So far Mudzingwa is the only one to suggest that action will begin before that Monday deadline. Embassy observers will remain alert to reports of protest over the weekend but are dubious that significant action will take place before the announced Monday start date. END SUMMARY

[¶](#)2. (U) In an official statement issued May 29, MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai cited recent political and economic woes, and the inability of the Mugabe government to deal with these. He appealed to all Zimbabweans throughout the country to participate in on-going prayer meetings, and during the week of June 2 to June 6, to "rise up in your millions and take part in nationwide peaceful protest marches for DEMOCRACY and GOOD GOVERNANCE", and to stayaway from work for the week. He emphasized MDC's commitment to non-violence and urged protesters to be peaceful even if provoked.

[¶](#)3. (C) PolOffs met Special Presidential Advisor Gandhi Mudzingwa later on May 29 and queried him about specific MDC plans. Official announcements and conversations with other MDC officials including MDC president Tsvangirai reported reftels have implied that demonstrations would take place on Monday or later next week and would concentrate on the city center. In contrast, Mudzingwa said that the MDC was adopting a different strategy which it hoped would demonstrate victory early. The party hopes to organize demonstrators in Harare to protest over the weekend rather than waiting until next week. The demonstrations would take place in the high density areas, particularly the western suburbs, on Saturday and Sunday. They would be called at the last minute and would be kept to perhaps a half a hour so that GOZ would have to scramble to react. If the police turned out in massive numbers in one area, the party plans to shift the demonstration to another location. This is a technique they used this week at prayer meetings. When the police showed up to prevent a crowd from gathering, MDC organizers were able to quickly pass the word and move the meeting to a different location. If the demonstrations go well, the MDC will declare victory and limit activities next week in Harare to primarily a stayaway, though Mudzingwa did not rule out further demonstrations. Outside of Harare however, protests are very likely to run into next week. According to Mudzingwa, the objective of this mass action is to erode the confidence of ZANU-PF supporters and convince them that the status quo cannot hold. Asked how these hit and run tactics would effect press coverage, Mudzingwa expressed confidence that they had reliable contacts in the press who would be on hand where needed.

[¶](#)4. (C) On the issue of police reaction, Mudzingwa said that they were confident that the majority were now either sympathetic to the MDC position or determined to remain neutral if at all possible. He was somewhat concerned about a few special units who have apparently received riot

training since March or that existing unit commanders would be replaced by GOZ militants, possibly war veterans. Mudzingwa said he thought the MDC's propaganda aimed at the army, as well as private conversations with selected army officers, had worked and that the greater part of the army was inclined to remain neutral - though all uncertainties on this front had not been eliminated. On the whole however, he believed that the MDC strategy would avoid confrontations by assembling and dispersing too quickly for the GOZ forces to be a problem.

15. (C) Comment: In theory Mudzingwa's plan sounds viable but it relies heavily on very good organization and communication, and the willingness of sympathetic police and local authorities to remain apolitical even if they get advance notice that a demonstration is imminent. Its avoidance of marching/demonstrations near State House or city center would be less neuralgic to authorities. The plan also relies on holding demonstrations in distant locales and spreading militant security forces too thin to respond effectively. Word travels fast though, and a harsh crackdown in one suburb could quell peoples' willingness to take to the streets in others. The MDC has a very limited track record of getting people to march, and it is unclear whether general frustration and desperation is enough to make notoriously patient Zimbabweans take to the streets in huge numbers.

16. (C) In light of the fact that to date Mudzingwa, though very well-placed in the MDC hierarchy, is the only source to report any action is planned before Monday, Embassy observers remain skeptical that any major events will take place over the weekend. End Comment.

SULLIVAN